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Summary record of the 2273rd meeting*
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 29 January 2018, at 9 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Winter

Contents

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Marshall Islands

* No summary records were issued for the 2270th to 2272nd meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Marshall Islands (CRC/C/MHL/3-4; CRC/C/MHL/Q/3-4 and CRC/C/MHL/Q/3-4/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Marshall Islands joined the meeting via video link.*

2. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands), providing background information on his country's history, geography and economy, said that the annual grant assistance from the United States of America under the Compact of Free Association was set to expire in 2023 and would be replaced by proceeds from a compact trust fund. The fact that approximately one third of the population continued to reside in remote atolls and islands made the delivery of basic services a major challenge. The United States nuclear testing programme of the 1940s and 1950s had resulted in both immediate and continuing effects on the human rights of the Marshallese people, including long-term health complications and the indefinite displacement of many persons. The Marshall Islands was one of the leading voices at the international level on the need for stronger climate change mitigation action, and the country remained committed to pursuing appropriate domestic adaptation measures to limit the impacts of climate change on its population. Young people were routinely included in national and international discussions on climate change. Children were highly vulnerable to phenomena related to climate change such as vector- or water-borne diseases, malnutrition and psychological and physical trauma arising from natural disasters.

3. In consultation with the national Human Rights Committee, the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs had taken the lead in developing the periodic report (CRC/C/MHL/3-4), with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Pacific Community's Regional Rights Resource Team. The report drew on information obtained from a number of stakeholder workshops.

4. The Marshall Islands remained committed to the objectives of the Convention and to improving the situation of children. Legislation adopted to that end during the reporting period included the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act, the Child Rights Protection Act, the Rights of Persons with Disability Act, and the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act. The Marshall Islands had ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and acceded to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It was also in the process of acceding to the International Labour Organization Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the first two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Marshall Islands intended to accede to and ratify the core human rights treaties and optional protocols but had limited capacity and resources to do so. The formal establishment of the national Human Rights Committee in 2015 had signalled the intention to move the process forward in a more organized and efficient manner.

5. One of the objectives of the Child Rights Protection Act was to protect children from discrimination, exploitation and any other physical, emotional or moral harm or hazards. Under the Act, parents and guardians were prohibited from refusing mandatory preventative or curative medical examinations and/or treatment for their children based on their religious or moral beliefs, and child victims or children at risk of neglect, abuse, maltreatment and exploitation were entitled to safe, temporary or long-term alternative care. A recently approved labour law established the minimum age for employment and the types of jobs that could be done by children.

6. The Constitution provided that education was a fundamental right of every child. Under the Public School System Act, free and compulsory primary and secondary education was provided from the age of 5. Inclusive education was provided in all public schools, and the special education programme was in line with the United States Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health

and Human Services, the Public School System carried out surveys to identify children with special needs for participation in the programme. Both corporal punishment and bullying were prohibited pursuant to regulations governing teacher and student conduct, respectively. The Public School System had introduced a child protection policy in 2014. Despite those achievements, learning and development outcomes remained below expectations. The Government would continue to work closely with its development partners in an effort to raise the quality of the education system.

7. When it came to health, significant progress had been made in reducing the under-5 and infant mortality rates. Nevertheless, there continued to be major challenges in ensuring adequate health and nutrition, especially for young children. According to the results of a comprehensive nationwide survey on child health and nutrition conducted by UNICEF in 2017, 35 per cent of children were stunted and rates of immunization and breastfeeding were lower than acceptable. The Government had moved swiftly and was now working with the World Bank and UNICEF to develop a multi-year, multimillion dollar early childhood development programme.

8. In terms of future challenges, Agenda 2020, the President's road map for reform and development, called for a comprehensive review of laws, including those related to children's rights. Specific attention would be paid to ensuring that provisions on corporal punishment were strengthened and harmonized, in particular in the Criminal Code. Organizations responsible for oversight of children's issues, including the Human Rights Committee and the Child Rights Office, needed to be strengthened, as did the Police Department and the network of social workers. Enhancing partnerships with civil society was also a priority. Awareness of children's rights and the Convention must be improved, and a parliamentary child rights champion would be nominated to ensure that all legislation took account of the interests of children. On data collection, a comprehensive database of indicators reflecting the status and welfare of children would be developed in cooperation with the national statistics office.

9. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** (Country Rapporteur) said that the State party was to be commended on the sincerity with which it had recognized the main challenges it faced. He would welcome details of the timeline for the ratification of the core human rights treaties and the harmonization of national legislation. He would like to know more about how the legislation on the rights of children and of persons with disabilities was implemented in practice and about awareness-raising on those laws. He wished to know about plans to develop a strategic plan for policy on children and the mandate, financial and human resources, and coordination function of the Child Rights Office. He would welcome an update on the process of amending the Constitution to include disability as a prohibited ground of discrimination and the action being taken to prevent discrimination against children living with HIV/AIDS. Information would be welcome on whether there was a specific constitutional provision enshrining the principle of the best interests of the child and what measures were in place to ensure that it was fully taken into account by public officials.

10. He would like to know what measures were being taken to combat corporal punishment in schools and family settings, to promote positive discipline and to implement a confidential complaints mechanism in schools. The delegation might comment on action being taken to overcome the cultural obstacles to reporting cases of child sexual abuse and on the alternative care system for children deprived of a family environment. He would like to know about efforts to promote breastfeeding, including the certification of child-friendly hospitals, to address the high rate of teenage pregnancy, particularly in rural areas, and to tackle substance abuse and suicide among adolescents.

11. **Mr. Lumina** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to know what mechanisms were in place to ensure the efficient use of the budgetary resources allocated to the social sectors that supported the realization of children's rights. Other than the Trust Fund, what plans were in place to ensure funding for social investment beyond 2023 when the annual grants under the Compact expired? He would welcome details of the impact of the fiscal adjustment implemented in response to the 2016 International Monetary Fund debt sustainability analysis on budgetary allocations to sectors that supported the realization

of children's rights, including education and health and how long the adjustment would be in place.

12. Noting that many words in Marshallese used to describe persons with disabilities carried negative connotations that reinforced discrimination against them, he asked what was being done to address the problem and change mindsets and how the sustainability of the special education programme for children with disabilities was ensured. Information would be appreciated on measures taken to address disparities in the quality and accessibility of health care between regions. He would like to know whether the Government had researched the reasons for the high teenage pregnancy rate, when comprehensive sex education would be introduced into the school curriculum and whether there were plans to renew the National Strategic Plan and the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Strategy. He would be grateful for information on measures to reduce the risk of HIV infection among adolescents and plans to enact legislation to protect people, including children, who were HIV positive and to provide a legal framework for ethical human research. He would like to know what was being done to address the long-term adverse consequences of nuclear testing on children's health and to prevent exposure to gamma radiation.

13. With regard to education, he would be interested to hear what efforts had been made to secure resources for the revision of school textbooks to remove gender stereotyping and to ensure that all schools had equal access to resources to enable them to follow the government curriculum. He wished to know what measures were in place to address the situation of girls, particularly from East Asia, who were subjected to domestic servitude and commercial sexual exploitation. Information would be welcome on the number of people investigated, prosecuted and convicted for trafficking in or exploitation of children, the support provided to child victims of such practices and the measures in place to combat trafficking of children within the Marshall Islands and to the United States.

14. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** said that he would like to know whether the proposed ombudsman's office would be empowered to handle complaints from children and whether its staff would include at least one specialist in child-related issues. Noting the information provided in paragraph 196 of the State party's report, he enquired what legal and policy measures had been taken to regulate the employment of adolescents and to prohibit the employment of children as street vendors.

15. **Ms. Otani** said that she would like to know whether there were plans to incorporate the Convention into school curricula and, if so, when; what obstacles to the dissemination of the Convention had been encountered; whether training on the Convention was provided to all relevant professionals; and whether the Government collaborated with civil society organizations to raise awareness of the Convention.

16. Noting that the National Nutrition Children's Council had been assisted by NGO representatives, she wondered whether the newly established Human Rights Committee cooperated with civil society in a similar way and to what extent civil society organizations would be involved in the follow-up to the Committee's recommendations.

17. She asked whether the State party planned to evaluate and address the impact of the business sector on children, taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights and other relevant guidelines.

18. She would also like to know whether children were heard in judicial proceedings relating to custody, adoption, separation from parents or juvenile crime; whether the professionals involved in such cases received specific training; whether there were plans to conduct awareness-raising to promote child participation in the family setting; and whether children had the opportunity to participate in discussions and decision-making on issues that affected them, such as climate change.

19. Lastly, with reference to paragraph 68 of the State party's report, she asked how the Government monitored the prevalence of customary child marriage.

20. **Ms. Sandberg** said that the Committee was concerned that birth registration remained inadequate when it came to births at home, births to young or unmarried mothers

and births in the outer islands. It would be useful if the delegation could comment on those concerns and provide information on the content of the Birth, Death and Marriage Registration (Amendment) Act of 2016, the outcomes achieved by the task force that had been established to examine civil registration practices, and any further measures that would be taken to increase birth registration.

21. **Ms. Khazova** said that she would appreciate more information on the extent to which fathers were involved in raising and providing for their children and the efforts that had been made to combat the traditional belief that children were primarily the mother's responsibility.

22. Regarding domestic adoption, she asked how often formal adoption took place; whether steps would be taken to promote formal adoption; whether the Adoption Act of 2002, as amended in 2016, contained provisions on customary adoption; and what steps would be taken to improve the monitoring of customary adoption. With respect to international adoption, she enquired whether Marshallese children who were adopted by people abroad were able to stay in contact with their biological parents. Lastly, she asked whether the offence of kidnapping, as described in paragraph 123 of the State party's report, covered parental kidnapping.

23. **Mr. Nelson** said that he would like to know whether the State party planned to review the age of criminal responsibility, the rebuttable presumption that children between the ages of 10 and 14 were incapable of committing homicide and the provision whereby a juvenile offender aged 16 or over who was deemed sufficiently mature could be tried as an adult.

24. More generally, he wondered when the Juvenile Procedures Act of 1966 would be modernized with a view to establishing specialized juvenile courts and providing training for judges, prosecutors and support workers dealing with juvenile offenders.

25. He enquired whether legal aid was available to children and, if so, at what stage of the proceedings; whether alternative measures, such as probation, were used for juvenile offenders; how many children were currently in prison; whether those children were being held with adults; and whether they had access to health and education services.

26. Lastly, he asked whether child victims and child witnesses were afforded special protection by law; whether shelters were available, particularly for victims of domestic violence; and whether there was a special procedure for taking statements from children.

The meeting was suspended at 9.55 a.m. and resumed at 10.15 a.m.

27. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that a number of steps had been taken to improve the implementation of human rights legislation and policies. For example, the Human Rights Committee had been established as a monitoring, and reporting body, and measures had been taken to improve the staffing and capabilities of the Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office.

28. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked whether the delegation could give an example of specific measures taken to implement a particular law or policy.

29. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that, in order to implement the Birth, Death and Marriage Registration Act, the Government had invested in a communication system to enable communities in 10 outer islands to register births via the Internet.

30. The national budget had increased in recent years, thanks to revenue from the fishing industry. That increase was more than enough to compensate for the decrease in financial assistance under the amended Compact of Free Association. The Government was aware, however, that it needed to allocate more resources to the social sector and, more specifically, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which currently received only 2 per cent of the national budget.

31. **Mr. Lumina** asked why the State party had referred to a lack of resources in its report, if the national budget had increased. It was unclear why the increase in the national budget had not led to a comparable increase in social spending.

32. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that, although the national budget had increased, the amount allocated to the social sector had not changed. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, in particular, suffered from a lack of resources. It should also be noted that an increase in budget did not mean an immediate improvement in capabilities.

33. The atolls that were most heavily affected by the nuclear testing programme were uninhabited. All Marshallese citizens had access to a whole-body radiation counter. Studies were being conducted, in collaboration with the United States Department of Energy, to assess the level of background radiation. His Government was trying to persuade the Government of the United States to do more to address the issue, which was a legacy of the trusteeship period.

34. There were a number of civil society organizations working to protect and promote child rights. One major NGO was working with the Government to provide early childhood health and nutrition support, for example. The President of the Marshall Islands had recently held a high-level dialogue with civil society leaders to identify areas in which cooperation with civil society could be strengthened.

35. The Government was aware that it had not done enough to assess the impact of the business sector on children's rights and would welcome advice from the Committee in that regard.

36. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands) said that the principle of the best interests of the child, although not currently enshrined in the Constitution, had been incorporated into some pieces of legislation. For example, the Adoptions Act set forth that courts should uphold the best interests of the child as a priority in rulings on adoption cases. The main principle underlying sentencing decisions in judicial proceedings involving children in conflict with the law was the social reintegration of the child.

37. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he wished to know about the alternatives to the physical punishment of children by teachers and parents.

38. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands) said that the Government continued to raise awareness about different methods of disciplining children, other than corporal punishment, in the education system and among parents.

39. **The Chair** asked whether corporal punishment was prohibited by law.

40. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands) said that corporal punishment was prohibited under the Child Rights Protection Act, the Marshall Islands Public School System Act and the Child Protection Policy of the Public School System. The Government planned to amend the Criminal Code, recognizing that it contained a provision justifying corporal punishment and the use of force.

41. The Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act 2017 included provisions to combat trafficking in children. Although no such cases had been detected, the Government had established a national task force on human trafficking, which had helped to develop policies and standard operating procedures for the police and victim services to identify and assist trafficking victims, including children.

42. **Mr. Lumina** said that the Committee had been informed of some child trafficking cases in the Marshall Islands. Did the statement that no cases had been detected mean that the Government had not taken steps to investigate trafficking?

43. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands) said that some investigations into child trafficking, especially trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, had been initiated since the enactment of the 2017 legislation.

44. The proposal to establish an ombudsman's office with the ability to receive complaints would require a constitutional amendment in order to come to fruition; therefore it would have to be put to a public referendum. In the event of a positive outcome, the Government would then draft legislation relating to the establishment, powers and responsibilities of the office.

45. As to customary marriages under the Birth, Death and Marriage Registration Act and customary or informal adoptions under the Adoptions Act, little monitoring was

currently carried out to establish the prevalence of those practices. The delegation noted the need for improvement in that regard and would bring the matter to the attention of the relevant authorities.

46. **Ms. Khazova** said that she would be grateful for further details as to the nature of the provisions on customary adoptions.

47. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands) said that the customary adoptions recognized under the Adoptions Act referred to the informal adoption of children by members of their extended family.

48. **Mr. Lumina** said that he would welcome a reply to his earlier question regarding the number of people investigated, prosecuted and convicted for the offence of trafficking of children. Information might also be provided on the degree and nature of the support provided to child victims of trafficking. What programmes were in place to address the sexual abuse of children and to overcome cultural obstacles to dealing with child abuse?

49. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands), responding to the question of whether adopted children were able to maintain contact with their biological family, said that the Adoptions Act made clear that the Marshall Islands implemented an open adoption system whereby adoptive parents were required keep in contact with the biological parents. While the authorities were not aware of any cases of parental kidnapping, he believed that the relevant provision of the Criminal Code was broad enough to include parental kidnapping; in that regard a test case was ongoing and the State party would report its outcome at a later date.

50. The Government acknowledged that the age of criminal responsibility and the rebuttable presumption of capacity for murder and rape cases for children between the ages of 10 and 14 years should be reviewed as part of its legislative reform programme, which would consider the Criminal Code. It was also committed to significantly amending and updating the Juvenile Procedure Act. There were no juvenile detention facilities in the Marshall Islands; in juvenile criminal proceedings, detention was always the last resort.

51. **Mr. Nelson** said that he wished to know whether any juveniles were being held in detention and, if so, in what type of facility. He would be grateful for information on the alternatives to deprivation of liberty that were implemented by the State party, and on procedures for the protection of, and the taking of evidence from, child witnesses and victims.

52. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands) said that any juvenile detainees would not be housed with adults, but held in a separate, secure room.

53. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that the delegation did not have information at its disposal on the number of juveniles in detention. It undertook to provide the Committee with written information in that regard, as well as in reply to the questions about child victims and the training of judges in the administration of juvenile justice, within 48 hours following the meeting.

54. **Ms. Dismas** (Marshall Islands), responding to a number of questions on education, said that inclusive education was in place at the preschool, primary and secondary levels so that all children with disabilities, including those from outer islands, were included in mainstream classes. A special education programme provided funding for teachers in all urban and rural schools. Considering that education was compulsory for children aged 5 to 18 years, the Government did its utmost to track children who were not in school — a situation that tended to arise when families relocated to the main population centres of Majuro and Ebeye — and to assist their families through the allocation of school places.

55. Corporal punishment was addressed under the Child Protection Policy of the Public School System, which required teachers to abide by a code of conduct that prohibited it. Training in the Policy had been provided for teachers and principals, and efforts were under way to establish local school boards in the outer islands to help monitor its implementation. School management and administration, supported by outside agencies, worked with parent-teacher associations to raise awareness of the Convention and to teach parents that corporal punishment was not acceptable.

56. A policy was in place to allow pregnant students to remain in school for as long as possible and to return to their studies after giving birth. At least 76 public elementary schools, including schools on all major atolls, provided access to education in rural and remote areas, while buses transported children to and from their schools. For the past three years, the Government had made efforts to address classroom overcrowding by assigning more teachers to kindergarten and the first three grades of primary school. An infrastructure plan to build additional classrooms was being implemented on all islands.

57. Although the Convention was not part of the school curriculum, Ministry of Education teams visited different schools to provide training on the Convention to teachers and principals. The Government accepted that textbooks needed to be amended to ensure that gender stereotyping was removed.

58. For older students wishing to continue their education, the Government provided a general education programme for those who had dropped out of school, a vocational training programme known as the Life Skills Academy, and the Waan Aelõñ in Majel programme of the National Training Council, which taught young women and men in the local skills of navigation and canoe-building. The National Training Council also enrolled students in programmes in the United States, while the College of the Marshall Islands and the University of the South Pacific were formal institutions that offered higher education pathways for students. Scholarship programmes, including those supported by donor countries, were available for those wishing to pursue careers in health, education and business. A few highly talented students participated in the United World Colleges programme.

59. **Mr. Gastaud**, expressing concern that many students did not return to the Marshall Islands once they had completed their studies, said that he wished to know how the Government ensured, or planned to ensure, the return of qualified graduates, who were essential to the country's economy and development.

60. **Ms. Dismas** (Marshall Islands) said that, although the Government had always intended for the students to return, in the past that aspect of the scholarship policy had not been effectively implemented. In recent years, the scholarship board had taken a more assertive approach in encouraging scholarship recipients to return to the Marshall Islands, with some success.

61. **Ms. Helkena** (Marshall Islands) said that the Ministry of Internal Affairs had been unable to fully deliver certain programmes and services due to funding constraints, although the Government had made headway in some areas with the support of development partners. Lack of resources and capacity meant that the State party was unable to fully implement the recommendations received as part of the universal periodic review to ratify all core international human rights treaties; it had already invested a significant amount of time in implementing the recommendations made under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Government was taking a strategic approach to see which instruments it might ratify in the coming years. Lastly, she said that the Government planned to carry out a national consultation to identify gaps and potential areas of improvement, which it aimed to address with the assistance of development partners.

62. **Mr. Ishoda** (Marshall Islands) said that, although climate change was a threat to everyone in the Marshall Islands, not only children, efforts to raise awareness of its impact nonetheless focused mostly on children. Climate education was included in the science and social science programmes in the country's public schools. Courses on gardening and traditional knowledge reconnected young people and the environment. The country had also had a summer camp that focused solely on climate change and other relevant environmental issues, such as waste management. A number of activities relating to awareness of climate change, including mock negotiating sessions and essay or poster contents, had involved students at all levels. The delegation of the Marshall Islands to the 2015 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change had included a large number of young people. The expected effects of climate change were discussed as part of the community-engagement programmes organized by the Government on the country's outer islands.

63. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that answers to a number of questions concerning children's health would be provided in writing in due course. The integrated child health and nutrition survey conducted in 2017 with the support of UNICEF had made it possible to collect information about breastfeeding in the Marshall Islands. The Ministry of Health and Human Services was aware of the need to promote breastfeeding and could propose a number of relevant initiatives that could feed into an early childhood development programme, which was currently in the planning stages.

64. The country's two main hospitals were on Majuro and Ebeye. The hospital on Majuro was undergoing a five-phase renovation to expand and modernize its facilities, including for children. Completion of the first phase was expected later in the year. The renovation had been funded under the Compact of Free Association with the United States.

65. The fall of teenage pregnancy rates in the Marshall Islands could be attributed at least in part to the work that had been done by an NGO, Youth to Youth in Health, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund. However, for reasons unknown to the authorities, that support had come to an abrupt end. The Government would seek to ascertain whether the support could be resumed. He was unaware of any studies exploring the root causes of teenage pregnancy in the Marshall Islands.

66. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she wished to know whether abortion was criminalized in the State party and, if so, whether any exceptions were made in cases of rape, incest or fetal abnormalities. She also wished to know what kind of care was provided for girls who had had abortions, unsafe ones in particular.

67. It would be interesting to know whether transport was provided for children who lived far from schools and whether the country's schools had cafeterias and provided meals to their students. In addition, she wondered what the State party's current vaccination rates were, whether it was possible to supply the outlying atolls with vaccines that needed to be kept cold during shipment and what measures were taken to ensure that all children were vaccinated.

68. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether reports that children born to unmarried adolescent mothers were not always registered were accurate.

69. **Ms. Khazova** asked why children over the age of 16 could not be adopted under the State party's laws on adoption.

70. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Island) said that he was not aware that the failure to register births to adolescent mothers was a problem. Immunization coverage rates from 2010 to 2016, which were lower than the authorities would have liked, were shown in tables 4 and 5 of the replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/MHL/Q/3-4/Add.1). Increasing coverage rates would be a major focus of the planned early childhood development programme. In general, maintaining an unbroken cold chain during the shipment of vaccines to far-flung atolls was a challenge. Information as to whether any specific measures had been taken in that regard would be provided in writing.

71. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether the State party, in addition to programmes to raise awareness of the effects of climate change, had put in place disaster-readiness and evacuation plans.

72. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that, along with Maldives, Kiribati and Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands was one of the world's four coral atoll nations. Its low-lying land meant that it did not have enough evacuation centres. Many public buildings, however, including schools and clinics, had been built to withstand typhoons and doubled as evacuation centres. A project to be financed by the Green Climate Fund and the World Bank, which was set to launch later in 2018, would address the country's capacity to evacuate populations threatened by natural or other disasters. The last option, in the event of a significant rise in sea levels, was to evacuate the entire country.

73. **Mr. Kawakami** (Marshall Islands) said that there were currently no provisions in the Criminal Code legalizing abortion in the event of rape or incest. He was not sure why the country's lawmakers had decided not to allow children over the age of 16 to be adopted.

Nonetheless, efforts were being made to define children as persons under the age of 18 in all the laws in which such definitions were relevant.

74. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that some suicide counselling services were available in the Marshall Islands. There was also a suicide-prevention hotline. The Ministry of Health and Human Services awarded grants to NGOs active in efforts to prevent and treat substance abuse by children or other young people. NGOs also worked with the police to ensure that stores did not sell alcohol or tobacco products to underage consumers. The percentage of stores that broke the law in that regard, once 100 per cent, had fallen to as little as 4 per cent in recent years. The authorities were negotiating with the United States on the possible extension of a number of substance abuse prevention programmes, funding for which was set to end in 2023.

75. The possible elimination of the $5 hospital fee, which covered the costs of basic medication, had been discussed by the country's health authorities and their partners. One proposal had been to reduce the fee for older persons and lower-income families, whereas another had been to do away with it altogether. No decision had yet been made, however.

76. School feeding programmes, which operated three days a week in urban areas, were in place. Plans had been made to expand the programmes to rural areas and provide meals more frequently. In urban areas, transport for students, including students with disabilities, had improved considerably. In the outer islands, however, where it would require improved domestic shipping services, it was still a major challenge.

77. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she would welcome an indication of 2017 immunization rates. It would be especially interesting to know whether children in far-flung areas of the country were systematically vaccinated for routine childhood diseases. In addition, she asked whether HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases affected the health of adolescents, whether the country had any programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV and, if so, whether those programmes reached mothers on the country's outer islands. Lastly, she would welcome an indication of current child malnutrition and mortality rates.

78. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that the latest immunization information available was from the fiscal year 2016. The data for 2017 were still being compiled. The integrated child health and nutrition survey provided somewhat more recent estimates of immunization coverage, however.

79. The Ministry of Health and Human Services had programmes for adolescent and reproductive health. Youth to Youth in Health was making ongoing efforts to lower rates of teenage pregnancy, although, as he had noted, it had suddenly lost a major source of funding and was therefore operating under greater resource constraints. Information on infant and under-5 mortality rates was included in the annex to the country's combined periodic report and in the replies to the list of issues. More recent data could be provided in writing.

80. The difficulty of maintaining an unbroken cold chain could lower vaccination rates in some areas. Information on any specific efforts to overcome the difficulty would be sought from the Ministry of Health and Human Services.

81. **Ms. deBrum** (Marshall Islands) said that one of the main findings of a recent survey conducted by the Ministry had been that high rates of teenage pregnancy on some outer islands had been caused by shortages of contraceptives. The findings of the survey had informed the development of policies on adolescent reproductive health.

82. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes**, noting that the Committee would be awaiting written replies to the questions that had not been answered, said that the State party seemed to be ready and willing to address the challenges it faced, including in connection with corporal punishment, the family environment and children's health. The efforts that the authorities of the Marshall Islands had made were commendable. They should continue making them.

83. **Mr. Graham** (Marshall Islands) said that, although not all of them had been answered, he welcomed the questions that had been posed by the Committee, as they made it possible for him and the members of his delegation to come away from the dialogue with

a clear view of what their country had done well and what it needed to improve. He and his delegation were looking forward to the Committee's concluding observations and any other recommendations it might make.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.